

BALTIMORE SUN

2 March 1987

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 1

Nomination of Gates gets another blow

Laxalt urges Reagan to take 'second look'

By Mark Matthews

Washington Bureau of The Sun

WASHINGTON — The already troubled nomination of Robert M. Gates as director of central intelligence received a further blow yesterday with a close adviser to President Reagan publicly urging the administration to take "a second look" at its choice.

Former Sen. Paul Laxalt, R-Nev., the Reagan intimate who played a key role in installing Howard H. Baker Jr. as the new White House chief of staff, said that "from all that I hear, and this comes from my colleagues in the Senate on both sides of the aisle, I think the Gates nomination is in trouble."

"And it isn't so much Mr. Gates. I think that everybody recognizes that he's a proven professional. It's because he has the smell of Irangate on him. And because . . . there was a CIA involvement," Mr. Laxalt said on ABC's "This Week" program.

"And unfortunately, I think that Mr. Gates is a victim of circumstances, one among many, and that he's had great difficulty in getting confirmed. I think the administration ought to take a second look."

While the White House officially was not backing off the nomination yesterday, one official said it would be conferring with Senate leaders about Mr. Gates' chances in the coming week. Senate Minority Leader Robert Dole, R-Kan., said, "I would guess that there would be some judgment made on that early this week."

White House spokesman Albert R. Brashear said Mr. Gates "will remain, so far as I know, the president's nominee."

At the CIA, spokeswoman Sharon Foster said of reports that the nomination would be withdrawn: "As far as we know, it's not true."

Mr. Gates, who was deputy director of the agency before his boss, William J. Casey, was hospitalized with a brain tumor in December, has been criticized for not reacting more forcefully to early CIA suspicions of a diversion to the Nicaraguan contras of proceeds from the Iran arms sales.

Questions have also been raised about the possible slanting of intelligence analysis to support the view of National Security Council staffers on Iran during the period when Mr. Gates headed the CIA's analytical side, as well as about his role

in preparing what many view as incomplete and possibly misleading Casey testimony in November.

Mr. Dole said congressional leaders told President Reagan in a meeting late last week that the nomination "could be in some difficulty" if there were a demand for a quick vote in the Senate. He said on NBC's "Meet the Press" that he had not yet completed a GOP vote count, but that even if the nomination cleared the Senate Intelligence Committee, there could be a "long process" on the Senate floor.

Lt. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, a Tower commission member rumored to have been mentioned as a possible CIA director, said yesterday that he had not been approached about taking the job.

Asked on "Meet the Press" if it were the kind of

job he might want, he replied: "Not particularly."

The *New York Daily News* and the *Washington Post* also reported that Edward Bennett Williams had been approached about the CIA directorship but turned it down. The *Daily News* quoted "reliable Senate sources" as saying Mr. Williams turned away the job offer in January, citing health reasons.

Mr. Williams' law firm represents Lt. Col. Oliver L. North, the former NSC aide who is a key figure in the Iran-contra affair.

Mr. Laxalt's warning about the Gates nomination came as GOP leaders looked to President Reagan's planned address to the nation Wednesday for assurance that he has learned the lessons of the Iran-contra affair as spelled out in last week's Tower commission report.

Following the resignation of Donald T. Regan and the selection of Mr. Baker as chief of staff, a new CIA nominee could offer the chance of a further break with officials who had some involvement, however indirect, with the Iran affair.

Representative Richard Cheney, R-Wyo., an influential Republican leader in the House, said that while "nobody's talking about Mr. Gates having done anything wrong," there is a fear that a final Senate vote on the nomination could be held up until congressional probes on Iran are completed in the fall.

"If they've got the votes, then I think they ought to go ahead and confirm him," he said on Cable News Network. "But if they don't have the

votes, then it seems to me it would be important to terminate the problem now and get somebody new up there who can get confirmed, rather than wait and drag it out for six months."

The Senate Intelligence Committee, which held the Gates confirmation hearings in open session, is due to meet again with him privately to allow members to ask further questions. This could occur Wednesday, when the committee has a meeting planned, according to spokesman David Holliday.

A Republican member, Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, has already called on the administration to consider withdrawing the nomination, and an influential Democrat, Georgia Sen. Sam Nunn, has said Mr. Gates' responses "gave me real pause."

He said a key concern was that "nothing was done" with information obtained by the CIA about a possible diversion of funds.

Mr. Gates has testified that CIA suspicions were based on an analytical judgment, not hard evidence.

Similarly, he said, it was the lack of hard evidence that prevented Mr. Casey from mentioning these suspicions when he appeared before the intelligence committee last November 21, four days before Attorney General Edwin W. Meese III disclosed the apparent diversion.

Washington correspondent Nancy J. Schwerzler contributed to this article.